

Education and Workforce Development Cabinet
Kentucky Summer Youth
Employment Program gives work
experience for at-risk group

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Editor's Note: Local information about the Kentucky Summer Youth Employment Program is available online at <http://oet.ky.gov/arraky.htm>.

FRANKFORT, Ky. — More than 5,000 Kentuckians between 14 – 24 years of age are gaining valuable work experience and earning a paycheck through the Kentucky's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).

The \$15 million federal program is funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and administered through the Office of Employment and Training (OET) in Kentucky's Education and Workforce Development Cabinet.

Public, private and non-profit employers are partnering with 10 local workforce investment areas across the state to provide work and training opportunities for low-income youth and young adults in their communities. Youth are paid through the federal program while employers receive a short-term employee at no cost to them.

Summer Youth Employment Programs are tailored to meet the needs of the youth and employers in local communities. It is a great opportunity for youth to gain work-readiness skills and earn money. It also benefits local employers who may not be able to afford summer help during this difficult economic time," said Pat Dudgeon, Workforce Investment Act youth program coordinator in OET.

Dudgeon said that the program is designed not to displace regular, full-time employees. "Local workforce investment boards ensure that youth work experience arrangements will not unfavorably impact current employees," she said.

The program, which runs from May 1 - Sept. 30, will employ about 6,000 youth when all participants have been placed. Youth are usually paid minimum wage for a specified workday/workweek. Worksites are coordinated throughout the commonwealth by local workforce investment boards as designated under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

Debby Combs, human resources manager, Kenton County Airport Board, Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport, said the program has been very successful for the airport and they wish they could have had even more participants. Three are employed by the board while two others are working for employers at the airport.

"The program has been very worthwhile for both the airport and its concessions. We are helping the youth in our community develop hands-on experience in an excellent work environment. The program gives them eight weeks of actual on-the-job skills funded by the Workforce Investment Act," said Combs.

The program targets low-income youth who have one or more of the following barriers: deficient in basic literacy skills; school dropout; homeless, runaway or foster child; pregnant or parenting; offender; or an individual (including a youth with a disability) who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.

"If they have life barriers and they get in a work situation with motivated employees and caring employees that want to help them, they thrive and they rise to the occasion. It's a great learning opportunity that they might not have had otherwise," said Combs.

Program participant Kyle Fibbe, 23, a senior at Western Kentucky University, is working in airfield maintenance at the airport. The Erlanger resident said he could not find an internship in his field of industrial science with a concentration in architecture, but he feels

lucky that he found a summer job and he enjoys the airport environment. He said he likes working in groups with all types of people and he enjoys working with his hands and completing projects such as painting runway lines.

"I like seeing a finished product and I'm getting that here. I'm really thankful for this job. The people I work with are great and I'm really satisfied. I would do it again," Fibbe said.

Combs said the program gives the airport an opportunity to be a good community neighbor and they are excited with the performance of the youth. "They're learning and they're delivering," she said.

The Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet coordinates learning programs from P-16, and manages and supports training and employment functions in the Department for Workforce Investment. For more information about our programs, visit www.educationcabinet.ky.gov or www.workforce.ky.gov, or call 502-564-0372.